



I help them in my own way

- exploring local humanitarian action
in Burkina Faso and Mali

A joint research collaboration by the West Africa Civil Society Institute,
Save the Children Denmark, the Global Fund for Community Foundations,
the STAR Ghana Foundation and the NEAR Network.



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Cover photo:

Photo of Banfora lady: Madame Limata, mother of 3 children, who, like many people in the community, assists her neighbors displaced by the conflict in a suburb of Banfora (credit: Madame Limata)

Photo of man in white shirt: "Man (IDP) in Kaya supported by Ocade" (credit: Association Burkinabé de Fundraising-OCADES Kaya, Burkina Faso)

Photo with ladies and children: The women from the Ramziya association of Burkina Faso feed the children of Banfora (credit: Ramziya association)

Photo of children: DSF Ouahigouya organising a drawing event for children (IDPs) (credit: Association Burkinabé de Fundraising-DSF Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso)

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“Focusing on the international humanitarian system to understand how people survive and recover from a crisis is akin to viewing a large landscape through a pin-sized hole. From capital cities to villages, the survivors of crisis draw on a wide range of overlapping resource flows and support networks. These forms of support are poorly linked to, understood or even acknowledged by humanitarian actors, partly because of their informality and complexity, but also due to lack of time and motivation in the humanitarian system to understand the contexts in which it operates”. State of the Humanitarian System, 2022, [1, p. 70]

Executive summary

This report focuses on local humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali, in particular humanitarian action carried out by civil society organisations and individuals, and reflects on how local models for humanitarian action may inform longer term visions for humanitarian aid in these two countries. The report adds to the emerging bulk of recent reports that look beyond international humanitarian aid and explores how existing models for local humanitarian action and resources support people in crises. This focus has come about through discussions in a research consortium with partners from the global South and the global North. Embedding the study in this consortium has resulted in findings that are not only relevant for Save the Children Denmark, but also for the partners in the research consortium from the global South. The report is a desk study complemented by a survey of more than 50 responses followed up with nine interviews. The report finds that there is a dearth of documentation about local humanitarian action in accessible literature in English and French. This documentation gap may reflect a documentation bias, as much of the accessible literature is commissioned and decided by initiatives led by the global North. This may have led to research questions that primarily are aligned with the main interests and agendas of the commissioning institutions. An effect of this documentation bias may lead to simplified understandings of the complexity and diversity of local humanitarian action, which may hamper progress on localisation of humanitarian aid. The report also finds examples of existing local aid models that are supported and scaled up by international aid, such as Habbanayé. The learning potential from these models requires further exploration, in particular with regard to how these configurations support people in crisis

and the role of international aid in supporting local aid models in the longer term. There are also examples of organisations in Burkina Faso that strategically work towards separating themselves from international humanitarian aid, and instead focus on how domestic aid systems and resources can be strengthened. Examples like this challenge international organisations to rethink aid modalities that also support national aid systems rather than primarily focusing on individual partnership and project modalities. Finally, the report suggests that an inclusive nationally-led discussion of long-term visions for localised aid could be helpful in guiding international, regional, national, and local humanitarian actors in the same direction on localisation, potentially within a national framework for localisation. In such a process, key barriers to localisation could be discussed and solutions to overcoming these barriers could be identified. If these solutions lie beyond what can currently be supported in current international-local partnership models, there is even more reason to pay attention to them. They may help push the localisation agenda beyond incremental change within the international humanitarian system.

1. Introduction

Since the adoption of workstream 2 “More support and funding tools for local and national responders” at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, localisation of aid has been widely debated by humanitarian stakeholders. Different interpretations of what this commitment known as “localisation” or “the localisation agenda” means to humanitarian stakeholders have both resulted in slow progress in implementing the agenda [2], as well as produced a range of strategic approaches and activities labelled as localisation.¹ A persistent challenge to country-level implementation is the prevalence of global North and top-down driven approaches to localisation. These are yet to have a fundamental impact at implementation levels. As the number of people in need reached a record high of 306 mio in 2021 the need for humanitarian reform is increasingly pressing [3, p. 11]. A 2019 report from Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on local resources in humanitarian crisis estimates that international humanitarian assistance comprise around 1-2% of the resource flows to countries affected by humanitarian crisis and finds that “At country level, there is a widely varying picture but there is a significant diversity of flows, and at household level people tend not to rely on a single source of support” [4, p. 24]. These multiple sources of support, particularly support provided by local humanitarian actors, are the focus of this report, as it explores different ways of working with local humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali. The report also reflects on how local humanitarian action may inform longer term visions for humanitarian aid in these two countries. Reflecting on this question may spur a discussion about ways of overcoming barriers to current top-down ways of working with localisation and point towards future pathways for localisation. More specifically, the report explores the following research questions:

a. How is terminology around “the local”, “indigenous”, local aid, locally-led aid and localisation used by different humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso and Mali?

b. How are selected cases of local/locally-led aid in Burkina Faso and Mali influencing and influenced by domestic and international approaches to local humanitarian aid?

c. How can these models/cases inform longer term visions and approaches to local/locally-led/localised humanitarian aid in the Sahel?

¹ Direct funding to national and local actors reached 1.2% of total international humanitarian funding in 2021, down from 2.7% in 2017 shortly after the Grand Bargain was endorsed [3, p. 18]

2. Methods and limitations

Partnership-based research model

This study started out as many other pieces of research – with a global North based entity designing a study to address a knowledge gap relevant for the daily work of the organisation commissioning the study. However, the contradiction of doing a study on localisation entirely developed, led, and carried out by a global North entity was soon pointed out. The initial focus and research design were scrapped, and a new partnership-based research model was developed with West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), Global Fund for Community Foundation (GFCF), Star Ghana, Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), and Save the Children Denmark (SCD).² The partnership-based research model resulted in several key learnings. First, as the research questions were driven by the consortium partners, they became far more aligned with the interests of and relevance to the entire research consortium. Second, as Save the Children Denmark was in a leading or coordinating position, the model demanded continuous reflection about what good leadership and coordination look like in a setting where conventional power relations are intentionally challenged. Lastly, the study was not just about localisation, but also became an attempt to learn from what a somewhat “localised” research model and cooperation may look like. The achievements, challenges, and learning process of working with this model are documented in a separate, internal learning report.

Methods

The report is a desk study complemented with a broad online survey and nine online interviews carried out with local humanitarian stakeholders from Burkina Faso and Mali in 2022.³

The survey asked about examples of local aid from organisations in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and was shared through the networks of West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and Save the Children Denmark. The survey sparked more than 50 responses, all providing valuable insight into the diversity of ways in which local aid is provided and perceived in the three countries. The survey responses mainly highlighted different forms of community support and individuals supporting internally displaced people (IDP), which led to a focus on these two topics in the research, including when selecting people to interview. Furthermore, as the vast majority of the survey responses came from Burkina Faso and Mali, these two countries were agreed upon as focus countries for the study.

Nine semi-structured **interviews** were carried out online. Five interviewees are from Burkina Faso and four are from Mali. The interviews were subsequently thematically coded in NVivo.

The **literature** encompasses three categories: academic literature e.g. literature published in peer-reviewed journals, grey reports⁴, and newspaper and media articles. The same search terms were used in English and French for all the categories on Google Scholar, Scopus and through a broad internet search from 2016 onwards. Additional literature was identified by the research group.

Limitations

This report does not attempt to provide an exhaustive map of local humanitarian models and terminology, but instead seeks to highlight examples and discuss local humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali.

² The research has been organized around a research group consisting of WACSI, GFCF and SCD and a wider steering group that included all stakeholders. The steering group focused on developing research questions, while the research group focused on identifying literature, conducting interviews, putting together and sharing the survey, making adjustments in the research design, as well as ensuring the progress of the research process

³ See annex C for further details about methodology

⁴ In this report, the term “grey reports” primarily encompasses reports commissioned by development and humanitarian organisations. Though these reports are at times peer-reviewed, the term is used here to designate reports that have not been published as academic publications.

However, despite clear indications of the importance of local humanitarian action at community level and by individuals in Burkina Faso and Mali, there is a documentation gap on this particular field. This report highlights examples of local humanitarian action, but recognizes that these are fragments of a much larger and diverse field of action. For example, the main focus of the study is humanitarian action carried out by individuals and communities and it does not explore or discuss government-provided humanitarian aid, despite this aid being central to how many people manage crisis in Burkina Faso and Mali. This is the same for support from the diaspora, which usually makes out a massive contribution to how people manage in crisis. Support from the diaspora is not explored in this report.

Furthermore, a deep exploration of individually-provided ad hoc aid at community level could not be carried out, as access to individuals at community level was challenged by the research design. Future research designs would need to focus more explicitly on how informal ad hoc humanitarian aid provided by local individuals could be better captured, not least as this form of humanitarian action can be fundamental to how people in crisis manage their situation.

Finally, the lack of knowledge of French by the research coordinator required ad hoc translations of Francophone literature and data to English. Francophone research partners were involved in the research process, which to some extent mitigated the risk of meanings and concepts getting lost in the translation process. However, central terminology in French or other languages may unintentionally have been overlooked.

Development initiatives or humanitarian action?

This report focuses on how individuals and communities support people affected by humanitarian crises. The focus is consequently on humanitarian action understood as “Activities that save lives, protect livelihoods, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of crisis, as well as prevent and strengthen the preparedness for occurrence of such situations.” [5, p. 5].

The distinction between humanitarian action and development initiatives is artificial. Local actors do not necessarily distinguish between addressing acute emergency needs and longer term development activities. Many of the actions and initiatives described in this report are not exclusively or only aimed at addressing situations of short-term crisis or immediate needs, however, they are treated as such in this report. This choice on the one hand allows a more focused exploration of local humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali, on the other limits a deeper understanding of overlaps and linkages between short-term and long-term aid, as well as exploration of the humanitarian-development nexus.

3. Country context

Burkina Faso

A former French colony, Burkina Faso gained independence as Upper Volta in 1960. The name Burkina Faso, which means “Land of Honest Men,” was adopted in 1984. After years of gradual expansion of control of jihadist groups in Northern and Eastern Burkina Faso, the country experienced further escalation of violence in 2016, when Malian Tuareg fighters and Al-Qaeda launched attacks in southern Burkina Faso, including Ouagadougou [6]. This violence displaced 40,000 people and led to the recruitment of young people by armed groups. Political instability further culminated in 2022 with two military coups. The latest coup in September 2022 dissolved the government and suspended the constitution [7]. A Constitutional Council consisting of political parties and civil society organisations has been formed to prepare the political transition. These events have caused the displacement of more than a million people between 2015-2022 [8].

Mali

Before the 2012 Mali War, the country was characterised by its migrational practices including circular and seasonal migration and movements of nomads and breeders. These migrational patterns persist in some areas today. Chronic droughts in the Sahel led to mass migrational movements. In 2012 a coup was carried out by soldiers from the Malian army, disappointed with the handling of the Tuareg rebellion in the North. Shortly after, jihadist groups took control of Northern Mali. In January 2013, France commenced Operation Serval in Northern Mali followed by the deployment of the UN peacekeeping force, MINUSMA [9], [10]. Two coups were carried out in 2020 and 2021 and elections were pushed back [11]. Due to tensions between the French and Malian governments, as well as accusations of Mali working closely with Russian mercenaries, French troops were withdrawn from Mali in 2022 [12]. The pattern of political instability since 2012 has caused massive displacement, with the current number of IDPs, as of late 2022, estimated at more than 400.000 according to IOM [13].

“

As soon as the internally displaced people started coming to Banfora, some people offered the free houses that they had, women quickly collected clothes, kitchen utensils – to help them. Community donations constitute emergency relief because the first moments of displacement are very difficult to bear. These donations restore hope and help cushion the blow.

”

(Organisation in Burkina Faso, #9)

4. Literature on local humanitarian action in West Africa, Burkina Faso, and Mali

Localisation research is primarily found in grey reports commissioned by international organisations, often led by scholars based in the global North [14], [15]. According to an ODI report from 2021, policy research and grey literature make up as much as 44% and 42% of the localisation literature developed until mid-2021 [14, p. 20]. Larger research initiatives have carried out case studies on multiple countries such as Bangladesh, Colombia, DRC, Fiji, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Syria, Tonga, and Vanuatu.⁵ Organisation-, programme- and project-specific evaluations and reports can be added to this bulk of research. Case studies commissioned or led by the global North about localisation in West Africa, including francophone countries, are limited. ODI's literature study from 2021 lists no localisation case studies about Burkina Faso and Mali, and one about Niger [14, p. 22]. Interestingly, localisation research is generally critical of the dominant role of the international humanitarian system in aid responses. Nevertheless, Northern-based researchers to some extent mimic a similar position in localisation studies, as much localisation research is commissioned by Northern-based organisations and led by Northern-based researchers. Despite using the partner-based research model as explained in the methods chapter, the same largely applies to this study. This situation warrants self-reflection and prompts questions already

raised in other parts of academia, e.g. in the fields of development and gender studies, about whose knowledge counts [16], [17].⁶

Global South led studies of local humanitarian action in West Africa

Recently, however, localisation research from countries in West Africa have been launched.⁷ These include regional studies like WACSI's report on shifting the power, localisation and philanthropy in four countries in West Africa, and Travaille Consulting Group's description and discussion of how philanthropy can be supported in four West African countries [18], [19]. Other reports focus on one country only, such as IPBF's baseline study on community philanthropy in Burkina Faso. These surging studies recommend paying much more attention to local aid modalities and philanthropy and call for an exploration into ways they can be strengthened as well as increased attention to asymmetrical power relations between donors/INGOs and southern based organisations.⁸ These studies may also designate an emerging trend in the global South whereby the localisation agenda is used as a platform to explain and exhibit local humanitarian action and philanthropy - potentially with a view to enhance international as well as domestic or regional awareness of existing initiatives for humanitarian action and address unequal power relations.

5 See e.g. The Missed again series that documents the interaction between locally-led and internationally-led humanitarian aid, ODI's thematic focus on local humanitarian action, Tuft University's research series on localization of humanitarian action, the INGO consortium project "Accelerating localisation through partnerships" and Humanitarian Advisory Group's Humanitarian Horizons project.

6 International Humanitarian Studies Association adopted a manifest at the World Humanitarian Summit addressing some of the same concerns.

7 The reports "Localisation agenda, Shift the Power and African Philanthropic Models in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal" from 2021 by WACSI, and "The Baseline Study for the Development of Community Philanthropy in Burkina Faso (Summary Report)" from 2020 by IPBF,

8 See e.g. "Localisation Agenda, Shift the Power and African Philanthropic Models in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, Accra, Ghana, WACSI 2021

Burkina Faso and Mali, aid-specific literature, academic and grey reports⁹

While there is a general dearth of academic papers on local humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali, English academic papers about aid in the broader sense tend to focus on agriculture, health and nutrition, and lately also on COVID 19 [20]–[24]. Similarly, there are very limited French academic resources on local humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali. The few we identified focus on the challenges communities face, and the flawed and inadequate services government and NGOs provide [25], [26]. A common feature in the English and French academic literature is the focus on needs and the inability to respond to them rather than actual responses to these needs.

English-language grey reports explore relations between international and national/local organisations in Burkina Faso and are less focused on how communities and individuals respond to needs of crisis affected people. They for example show how local organisations see their capacities undervalued by international organisations, which hampers effective local humanitarian aid and implementation of the localisation agenda [26], [28]. Other reports focus on the challenges local actors face when working with Burkinabe communities [27] and explore through testimonies how communities respond to COVID 19 [29]. Grey literature about localisation of humanitarian aid in French seem to focus on conflict and environmental events, rather than corresponding local or community actor responses [30], [31]. With exception of two reports in English [27], [29], most grey reports in both languages do not document or analyse in-depth the role of local actors and communities when responding to humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso.

When it comes to grey literature on localisation in Mali, a short paper and a policy brief in English focus on conditions for IDPs in Bamako [32], and on how communities respond to COVID-19 in Gao [29]. These brief papers document community responses to humanitarian needs. There are more commissioned resources in French, most of them focused on conflict and insecurity-related events, rather than local actor responses to these

events [27] – a similar observation to that made about French literature relating to Burkina Faso. In summary, while the two brief papers in English-language about localisation of humanitarian aid in Mali seem to focus on humanitarian needs and responses of community responses, French-language reports tend to focus on conflict and events rather than responses.

English-language newspaper and media resources seem to take an international perspective on localisation in Burkina Faso by focusing on international actors and general conflict coverage. Examples include pleas for international donors to continue funding humanitarian efforts [28] and discussions of international agencies' cooperation with government authorities when responding to humanitarian needs [28], [29]. Contrastingly, French-language newspaper and media resources seem more attentive to national, regional, and local responses of local actors to conflict and crises. For instance, they detail the collaborative construction of IDP aid infrastructure in the Centre-Nord region [30] and describe how a local association provided food and school kits for IDPs in Koupéla [31]. Thus, while English-language newspaper and media may take an international perspective to humanitarian aid in Burkina Faso, French-language resources appear to opt for a more sub-national focus.

As is the case with Burkina Faso, English-language newspaper and media resources on Mali focus on conflict coverage, such as descriptions of conflict in the Menaka region and of gender-based violence in conflict areas [32], [33]. These articles discuss the responses to the conflict. The French-language newspaper and media resources discuss a variety of localisation events, such as fundraisers, panels, partnerships, and other responses to insecurity. These resources include descriptions of women's collectives in IDP camps, how IDPs trade agri-food products with each other, and education initiatives by IDPs [34]–[36]. Thus, while English-language newspaper and media resources analyse conflict-related events in Mali, French-language resources appear to focus more on sub-national responses to these events. None of the newspaper and media articles labelled aid as “humanitarian”, and rather described it as “local” or

9 Refer to Annex C for the method used to identify and select literature

“community” aid or support or as pertaining to a specific event (e.g. Solidarity Day) or a community practice. While both French and English-language media sources were consulted, more French-language newspaper and media resources were included in the research, as there was little media in English describing local aid and community practices in Mali and Burkina Faso.

In summary, literature on local humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali is very limited across categories. Academic articles and grey reports in English and French are largely occupied with health and nutrition or with cooperation between international and national/local entities. The focus appears to be on identifying and analysing humanitarian needs, and with few exceptions, little attention seems to be given to what local communities and individuals actively do to respond to these needs. News and media articles show a different pattern, especially in French, as a bulk of these articles are sub-nationally focused and concerned with community responses to insecurity and the humanitarian needs of IDPs. This preliminary finding points both to the need for more in-depth analysis of literature about humanitarian aid in Burkina Faso and Mali across categories and language, as well as the need for greater attention from scholars on how local communities and individuals respond to the needs of crisis-affected people with and without support from international entities. This latter point resonates with similar findings in global academic literature on localisation of humanitarian aid [37]. However, as pointed out in the previous section, accessible literature on localisation of humanitarian aid is now also emerging from the West Africa, which is more attuned to domestic philanthropy and community support.

Localisation as a concept in Burkina Faso and Mali

Localisation is not a widely used or integrated concept in the terminology of humanitarian stakeholders in Burkina Faso and Mali. As pointed out in a report by Coordination Sud/OngLab, “the closer one gets to the local level, the less well-known the concept of localisation is” [38, p. 29]. The same pattern emerged from

the interviews. Interviewees rarely used the term “localisation”, instead using terminology such “community/communities”, “local” and “help” to reflect on aid.¹⁰ Given that the interviewees were representatives of local organisations with limited geographical outreach or individuals providing aid, the discussion about “localisation” may primarily happen at the level of larger national or local organisations with a link to international humanitarian discussions.¹¹

WACSI’s 2021 report on philanthropic organisations in West Africa identified three primary ways of understanding localisation:

“...the localisation agenda revolves around three key important issues: empowerment of local organisations, gathering support from below and creating spaces for local ownership and partnerships with local CSOs as leaders and coordinators of projects and programmes [19, p. 45].

These understandings all emphasise change for local organisations and at local levels. However, the lack of or slow progress of the localisation agenda outside the international humanitarian system has prompted severe critique of the localisation agenda:

“Informed by this, concerns were also raised by a section of interviewees who argued for the need to change the narrative on the localisation agenda because of its emphasis on the structuring effects of the aid system rather than focusing on the agency of Southern-based organisations to address the constraints posed by the aid system on their operations. Thus, the localisation agenda was described as an outmoded concept with little or no relevance for Southern-based organisations because of its emphasis on changing the practices of organisations in the Global North such as donors and INGOs” [19, p. 45].

In Burkina Faso, one of the ways in which this narrative has been changed is by reframing the concept, shifting its focus to global South agency. For example, SPONG

10 NVIVO Word frequency query

11 Please refer to Annex A for use of key terminology in this report

in Burkina Faso advocates for more control mechanisms and demands on INGOs working in Burkina Faso under the heading of localisation [38]. In addition to advocating for reframing localisation within an existing system in Burkina Faso, this take on localisation shifts the focus from localisation modalities being driven by international humanitarian actors to being driven by humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso. Articulating the regulation of humanitarian space for INGOs as part of the localisation agenda is also seen in Indonesia [39]. Another way of challenging the narrative of localisation as driven by the global North involves positioning domestic philanthropy as a driver of the localisation agenda. In WACSI's study about localisation, Shift the Power and philanthropy in West Africa, the report finds that:

“This study highlights that domestic resource mobilisation has the potential to promote the localisation and shift the power agenda by making organisations become more flexible, autonomous, and also accountable to intended beneficiaries. This enhances their credibility and legitimacy” [19, p. 47].

Furthermore, this joint research report is another example of a global South driven interest in how localisation may be reinterpreted and reframed within existing aid terminology and local aid systems in Burkina Faso and Mali.

In addition to reframing, the localisation term is met with scepticism by some local humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso and Mali. A report from 2020 on international-local partnerships finds that some local NGOs suspect that localisation conceals hidden agendas. This suspicion is rooted in the lack of institutional capacity strengthening support to local actors, as well as international actors' continued practice of foregrounding their own actions and visibility without ensuring the same visibility for the work of local actors. In Burkina Faso, some local NGOs perceived localisation as a scheme that intentionally disguises the superiority of INGOs [38, p. 29, 30]. The extent of this perspective in and beyond Burkina Faso is unclear. However, it is notable that out of 15 global South countries that have

commenced work with one of the latest global Grand Bargain localisation initiatives, National Reference Groups, only one is in West Africa, namely Nigeria.¹² While there is no evidence of a causal effect, reasons for West African countries holding back on commencing work with the National Reference Group should be further explored.

Having briefly discussed localisation as a term which is not widely used by local humanitarian stakeholders in Burkina Faso and Mali and shown how the term is reframed and approached with scepticism, we now explore in more depth how local humanitarian action is referred to and carried out in Burkina Faso and Mali.

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5. Terminology on humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali

As we explore how local models of humanitarian aid may inform future pathways and reframing of localisation, in this chapter we focus on examples of how people in Mali and Burkina Faso refer and respond to humanitarian action.

Horizontal and vertical aid

In the following, the report provides examples of local aid that is not captured in formalised systems. These examples are described by using terminology drawing on horizontal and vertical philanthropy [40]. In this report, horizontal aid designates local humanitarian action carried out by people of largely the same resources, while vertical aid signifies aid provided by people with access to some financial resources to people with fewer financial resources.

Horizontal individual aid to crisis-affected people

Horizontal aid is likely a central source of aid for people in crisis in Burkina Faso and Mali, however seemingly poorly documented. The survey identified examples of individuals and communities who provide support to people in crisis in their villages using their own scarce resources. Subsequent discussions in the research group showed that this way of providing support is an embedded and integrated part of everyday life in Burkina Faso and Mali. While this type of support may be covered by the term “community support”, the emphasis here is on the will of individuals to provide support directly to people in need separately from more collective community support systems. An interview with a woman in Burkina Faso constitutes an illustrative example:

“Often I share the food when I cook, I serve them, in turn by family...Often, when things are not going well at home, they come to ask me. If I can, I help. If I can't, I see. I help them in my own way. They don't get much help. Only one day they were called to the social action...As long as

*I can share, I do it without hesitation.”
(Interview, BF 1)*

This model also responds to specific needs.

*“There were five pregnant women next to my house, I assisted them in giving birth, took three of them to the hospital because they don't understand neither Dioula nor French, only Moré and Fulfude. As I understand Moré, I went to translate, let them know when the midwife said to push, and not to push anymore.”
(Interview, BF 1).*

Or as it was described by responders in the survey:

*“In the nomadic environment, when a member of the community is in a difficulty and needs support, his community organises itself to help him. They will also watch over his family and animals until his return. And this is for free.”
(Organisation in Mali, #29)*

*“Yes, indeed at the beginning of the massive movements of populations from the villages of the center-north towards Kaya, the populations of Kaya mobilized donations and made a community meal to welcome the internally displaced populations in Kaya. It is an endogenous practice and with local resources it gives great comfort to these vulnerable populations.”
(Association in Burkina Faso, #7)*

Limitations to these practices were also reflected in the survey:

*“In fact, community donations are very meager and cannot cope with crises alone. We suggest supporting community organizations with enough resources to help vulnerable people.”
(Association in Mali, #36)*

“These gifts solve immediate needs, but in the long term there is not enough effect.” (Alliance in Mali, #19)

“Donations that give to the community are often useless. Except the support of international NGOs, who gives boreholes, schools and seeds for agriculture.” (Association in Mali, #31)

Five observations can be derived from these examples. Firstly, this type of horizontal support responds to needs quite accurately, and at the same time addresses more generic needs like food. This aid thus spans both generic and tailored support. Secondly, this support can be rather unreliable due to its dependence on the resources and goodwill of an individual or a community, as well as its unsystematic and spontaneous characteristics. Furthermore, it is unclear who qualifies for aid and why, as individuals may at times provide support to people they know, but also at times to people with whom they do not have a prior relationship. Thirdly, the language used by individuals providing support, like help, share, serve, and assist, differs from more vertical support that often use the language of distribution and delivery. These differences in terminology of humanitarian action may give an indication of proximity to the people in need which may also reflect how they are regarded by the aid providers. Fourthly, the question of individual and community support as an effective way of addressing crises in the short term and the long term is raised, as some see the nature and resources of short-term support as inadequate in a longer-term perspective. Finally, recalling the finding of ODI that people in need use multiple sources of aid to manage crisis [4], it may be suggested that individual and community support is fundamental to how people in need in Burkina Faso and Mali manage crisis. However, the scale of this support and its characteristics do not seem well documented, thus calling for further research into these practices in the region.

Vertical aid to crisis-affected people

National and local organisations in Burkina Faso and Mali remain key providers of support to people in crisis, though the differences between the organisations require more attention and documentation. The

organisations interviewed work with smaller local organisations and/or directly with community-based organisations. Most of these organisations work with both long-term development initiatives, such as Tontines, as well as “humanitarian assistance to local populations” (Interview, Mali 1). One organisation in Mali explains how development and humanitarian support go hand-in-hand:

“For emergency aid, we provide subsistence aid for their survival. Then we strengthen their capacities in development projects/programs for the integration and social integration. We can also help them return to their areas of origin.” (Interview, Mali 4)

A common feature of all these organisations is that they either take a role in organising community structures or work together with them, as decisionmakers about who to support and how. A national organisation in Mali explains:

“The communities are organized well into associations and groups and they know each other, which is why we rely on them for the good of our mission.” (Interview, Mali 1)

This is a rather localized way of working, though none of the organisations use the terms localisation, localized or locally-led to describe their activities. More predominantly, the vocabulary encompasses terms relating to distribution, providing help or assistance, helping and strengthening capacities. This may indicate a distance from the people in need compared with communities and horizontal aid, framing their support as sharing and giving. At the same time, it indicates that Grand Bargain localisation discourse is not mainstreamed at the level of local organisations in Burkina Faso and Mali.

Established aid concepts, Habbanayé and Tontine

More established aid concepts emerged from the survey and discussions in the research consortium, such as Habbanayé and Tontine. These two concepts designate established community systems that support poor individuals or at a larger scale address poverty

within a community. Both systems appear to be geared towards longer term development goals due to their timelines, however they can also be seen as contributing to mitigating the effects of crisis. Furthermore, as many crises are protracted, these aid modalities are also used to support people affected by crisis.

The **Habbanayé** system is part of the aid vocabulary in Burkina Faso and Mali. It is used in several countries in the Sahel and emanates from Fulani pastoralist practices. A wealthier family or friend lends a female goat, sheep or cow to the poor friend or family member who takes care of the animal until it has offspring. The friend or family keeps the offspring and returns the animal they borrowed. This practice enables the poor family member to start their own herd. Given the time it takes to get offspring, the system is primarily used to address poverty rather than respond to immediate needs, though offspring can be sold or consumed in times of crisis. Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and USAID have supported these models with considerable success in terms of increase in livestock for poor community members [41]–[43].

“The Habbanayé system consists of lending adult female animals to family members, friends or acquaintances in vulnerable situations. The family that receives the animals on loan assumes responsibility for them until the weaning of a new generation of animals. Loaned animals are then returned to the owner; the beneficiary family retains the descendants. This activity reinforces the solidarity between the members of the community. It allows families to build basic capital and promote animal production. The goat becomes a crucial productive asset and constitutes an important resource to strengthen the autonomy of families facing food insecurity.” (Organisation in Burkina Faso, # 1)

“**Tontine**” is also used across the Sahel. It can be translated to “rotating credit associations” in English [44, p. 7]. It is a saving and credit system in which members pay a contribution to the tontine and receive disbursements according to fixed rules. The system functions both as a saving scheme and as a way of generating interest. The system is named after Lorenzo de Tonti, an Italian political exile in France in the mid 1600 [45]. However, the system may have existed and evolved in different shapes, prior to and separate from de Tonti. For example, in a recent report about philanthropy in West Africa, Tontine is referred to as “an old African savings system” indicating its internalization or origin in African systems [18]. Globally, rotating credit associations or tontines exist in many countries, including in countries in the Sahel [18]. Like the Habbanayé system it has a somewhat extended timeline, as investments or savings may not result in immediate pay-outs, depending on how the group is organised.

Though the Habbanayé and Tontine systems may be seen as more development-oriented models, as the generation of income or resources slowly develops over a long time span, these models are still used, for example in protracted crisis situations. In the survey, tontines were mentioned by several respondents as an example of support to people in crisis, including IDPs. Few studies have examined the use of these two concepts as humanitarian modalities, even though such explorations could generate more knowledge about models for local humanitarian action. More studies into how these concepts work in short and longer timeframes should be undertaken.

In addition to Habbanayé and Tontine, the terms philanthropy and solidarity were discussed in the research consortium. These terms were also identified in the literature, though with key differences with regard to who was using them.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy mainly appears in literature developed by regional and national organisations, and is not usually used as a term by community-based humanitarian actors. As explained in the report by Travail Ensemble Consulting from 2022 “Philanthropy is practiced by everyone, albeit with a different name – solidarity or giving” [18, p. 11]. Similarly, a report

from IBPF on philanthropy in Burkina Faso finds that “...the term “Philanthropy” and even less “community philanthropy” is not too well known to the general public, especially individuals” [46, p. 8]. In the interviews with stakeholders from Burkina Faso, philanthropy was used as a term by three INGOs or national/local NGOs, while community-based stakeholders did not use the term at all. With regard to Mali, the term was not used in any of the interviews. These observations align with the findings of the above-mentioned reports and emphasise that terminology differs between types of local humanitarian stakeholders. Another observation suggests that understandings of philanthropy may be associated more often with longer-term support rather than emergency support. According to Dodgson and Gann, philanthropy tends to be associated with addressing root causes of needs, while the concept of charity tends to be linked to short-term and acute needs [47, p. 5, 6]. In one interview, local philanthropy projects were linked with longer term support rather than emergency support, suggesting a more development-oriented rhetoric when describing philanthropy (Interview, BF 3). This observation resonates with Hodgson’s definition of community philanthropy as “...a form of, and a force for, locally driven development that strengthens community capacity and voice, builds trust, and most importantly, taps into and builds on local resources...” [48, p. 5] and Dodgson and Gann’s reflection that philanthropy is often associated with addressing root causes, i.e. longer-term aid modalities. Dodgson and Gann, however, emphasise that this distinction is often blurred, as both concepts address root causes as well as more acute needs [47, p. 5, 6].

“

Community support is essential without which people will find it difficult to live. It responds to situations of distress. It thus allows the beneficiary to hold on for the first few days. It strengthens social cohesion and mutual support.

”

(Organisation in Mali, #29)

Furthermore, and like the concept of Tontine, the use of the term philanthropy may be a relatively recent undertaking. Acts of giving have long traditions in West African countries and in all other countries [18]. Literature that examines and uses the term philanthropy seems to be a more recent undertaking. It is noteworthy that literature concerned with philanthropy emanating from West African institutions has been developed in the last few years. This suggests that philanthropy has been introduced to discourse on localisation in Burkina Faso and maybe West Africa rather recently, potentially motivated by debates related to the Grand Bargain localisation agenda. If this is the case, philanthropy can prove an interesting case through which to learn more about how international policy on localisation is transformed and adjusted to national discourse, approaches, and implementation.

Solidarity

The term “Solidarity” seems to be widely used in the literature on Burkina Faso and Mali, and to some extent at community levels. Solidarity is mainly used in grey reports, followed by news articles and academic literature. Local actors and international entities use the term the most in the literature explored. The use of the term at community level is unclear in the dataset for this report, as on one hand the term was to some extent used by local actors, communities and NGOs in the literature reviewed, and on the other, the term was not used in any of the interviews. This discrepancy may be explained by the small interview dataset. A study on community philanthropy in Burkina Faso adjusted their data collection framework to “take into account the terms ‘local donation’ or ‘forms of solidarity within the communities’ which were more accessible” [46, p. 6]. Moreover, the term “solidarity” is reflected to some extent in grey reports quoting local actors directly or paraphrasing from interviews or as used by local actors to reports and media. Sources in French used the term more than sources in English, underscoring differences in terminology between the languages. Solidarity may be one of the most commonly-used aid terms across categories of literature on local humanitarian action and the term most closely matching how local actors reflect on aid.

This section highlights five main points. Firstly, terminology on humanitarian action is used in different ways by local humanitarian stakeholders in Mali and Burkina Faso, just as there are a range of different modalities for local humanitarian aid. This stresses the need to explore “local humanitarian action” as a multifarious concept and to produce more elaborated knowledge in future work that documents local humanitarian aid in Burkina Faso and Mali. In a global context, the same point is made by humanitarian scholars arguing that the notion of “the local” in the localisation agenda is seen as a singular entity or defined in opposition to or as being different from “the international”. Simplified understandings of “the local” create analytical blind spots that hamper informed approaches to localised aid [49], [50] and documentation of such aid, for example by overlooking the role of government-led responses and response structures or relations between different local humanitarian actors (e.g. government and civil society). Secondly, literature on humanitarian action is only scarcely focused on horizontal and vertical humanitarian aid provided by local actors in Burkina Faso and Mali. This means that there is little documentation about the terminology, approaches, and scale of horizontal and vertical humanitarian aid in these two countries, despite indications that this aid is fundamental to how people in crisis are supported. More established aid concepts like Habbanayé and Tontine have gained more attention and are more extensively documented, however not as modalities for humanitarian action, even though they may be used as such too. Thirdly, horizontal and vertical humanitarian aid is highly localised in the sense that it is motivated, decided, and driven by local actors, though this support may not be articulated as localised. Fourthly, solidarity seems to be the term mostly recognised across categories of local humanitarian actors when describing aid, while philanthropy is still being introduced at regional and national level. Lastly, there are some indications that terminology changes according to proximity between humanitarian aid providers and people in crisis. Though not documented in this report, this could have an impact on the aid provided to people in crisis, including, for example, the level of tailored support.

These points indicate that visions for localisation in Burkina Faso and Mali should build on more detailed

knowledge of modalities for local humanitarian action. Such a starting point requires stepping up documentation and research about local humanitarian action, including and in particular about support untied to international funds. But it also requires an approach to the localisation agenda which recognises that just because something is not documented it does not mean that it is not happening.

“

Community donations (shelter, food, living space) are quicker and make it possible to deal quickly with humanitarian crises. They are not heavy procedures.

”

(Burkina Faso, #16)

6. Linkages between systems of aid

This chapter explores how aid practices may influence and link to each other across categories of humanitarian aid providers and discusses the lack of documentation on the subject.

Limited inclusion and local actors as implementers

Though evidence is scarce, reports suggest that interaction between international and national and local organisations remains limited in the humanitarian cluster system, and that international-local partnerships remain unequal [51], [52]. As highlighted in other sections of this report, literature on the local humanitarian aid landscape in Burkina Faso and Mali is sparse. While it is tempting to suggest that this gap may signify a lack of cross-influencing between humanitarian aid practitioners, it is more likely that influences have not been documented. However, a social network analysis published in 2022 establishes that there is room for improvement when it comes to cooperation between international humanitarian actors and national and local aid practitioners in Burkina Faso. The analysis focuses on how humanitarian actors within the field of education and child protection are connected and how centrally they are positioned in UN coordination systems.¹³ The study observes that local civil society actors in Burkina Faso are increasingly capable of supporting populations without resorting to foreign partners, pointing out, however, that “...INGOs and UN agencies still do not take these local actors into account in their programming or networks—a key element of the Grand Bargain” [51, p. 11]. The finding of limited involvement of local actors particularly related to the cluster system resonates with findings made in other parts of the world [53], [54].¹⁴ This emphasizes the discrepancy between the intentions of the local-

isation agenda and its implementation in practice. Furthermore, this finding highlights the persistent challenge for the international humanitarian system to adequately link with and build on local humanitarian aid models.

Partnerships between local and international humanitarian actors is becoming an increasingly popular localisation modality for international organisations. However, though partnerships foster interaction and forge interconnections and potentially exchanges of knowledge between international and local partners, a study in Burkina Faso developed by Oxfam points out the unbalanced relationship:

“Local and national partners are still largely relegated to the role of data collecting and technical monitoring and evaluation during implementation. They rarely participate in other strategic phases of the project cycle” [52, p. 9].

Furthermore, the report provides examples of international organisations who have benefitted from data collected by local organisations, however without any benefit for the local partners. This has led to a local aid actor describing this as “an abuse of the associations because they [the international partners] are getting resources from them instead of supporting them” [52, p. 9]. Barriers to “adequate funding and the urgency of the response” are cited as main reasons for local humanitarian actors’ limited involvement in the full project cycle [52, p. 9, 10]. Other partnerships may yield better results in terms of local leadership. For example, UNICEF financially supported a Burkinabe community-based association-led project which provided protection and education assistance to IDP children.

13 The analysis was carried out using 5W UN data.

14 To address this challenge guidance on inclusion of local actors in the cluster system has been developed within the framework of the Grand Bargain Localisation Working Group; however, its effects remain to be seen and documented. See e.g. [Guidance Note on the Participation of Local Actors in Humanitarian Coordination Groups](#).

“

Community donations are part of community aid practices. Already at the village level, all people or families are known and categorized into rich, moderately rich and poor, i.e. according to their level of vulnerability to crises. This already known structuring is implemented for crisis management I suggest that the community structuring be valued because it represents the real picture of the aid structure.

”

(Organisation in Mali, #53)

Staff from the community-based association reported that this approach generated legitimacy and leadership, especially when coordinating their local projects. Christian Aid supported SERACOM, a Burkinabe NNGO with flexible funding and coaching, resulting in faster decision-making by SERACOM, as international procedures were avoided [52]. These examples show that international-local partnerships can support local humanitarian leadership, however seemingly most successfully when local actors are part of all phases in the project cycle and there is genuine flexibility and space for decision-making by Burkinabe partners in the partnership.

International-local influencing and privileging national aid

The Habbanyé system provides an interesting example of how international aid can support existing local practices, however there are also examples of how national aid can be privileged by national actors.

Both the LWF and USAID have invested in the Habbanyé system with fruitful outcomes. A report from LWF documents an increase in the size of herds for the participating households, which functions as a buffer against serious droughts and other shocks. Addition-

ally, improvement of the status of women within their households and communities was reported as an outcome. Challenges included participants believing they would lose their herd at the end of the project as well as problems with feeding the herd during dry seasons. The report recommends addressing challenges like this through well-known mantras of community participation throughout all phases of the project design [41]. The model, however, indicates that there is added value in supporting existing local aid systems and documenting them. The Habbanyé example shows how international organisations can work with existing development models in cooperation with local organisations or communities.. From a localisation perspective, however, such an approach also maintains a central role for an international donor, which raises questions regarding the role that a funding partner could play when supporting local models.

Another take on localisation is a privileging of national aid over international aid, by seeking active detachment from international organisations. This is the strategy adopted by a local organisation in Burkina Faso, which explains its choice as follows:

“The motivation for this project was to break the external dependency, i.e. to avoid the constant seeking help from foreign partners for development and optimize indigenous methods with the members of the communities by making them aware of the merits of the initiative.”

(Interview, BF 3)

The project focused on various forms of domestic fundraising. In other words, the organisation's resources were directed at raising funds in-country rather than seeking international partnerships. The privileging of national aid over international aid may enhance further exchanges of ideas and practices between national actors. It also raises the question of whether the current role of international organisations as partners for individual national and local organisations should be rethought, and, as suggested in the report by WACSI, potentially be guided by reflection on how international actors may best support a domestic funding environment [19].

This chapter has raised three main points. Firstly, like much literature on global aid, there seems to be room for improvement when it comes to the inclusion of local aid actors in the UN cluster system in Burkina Faso. Additionally, some international-local partnerships in Burkina Faso suffer from the same inequalities as partnerships in many other countries, relegating local partners to implementing partners without strategic influence or access to all parts of the project cycles. These observations resonate with findings in other parts of the world.¹⁵ However, as described above, there are examples of partnerships that are more equal in terms of influence. Secondly, there are examples of how international aid can successfully support existing local aid systems, such as the Habbanayé, when taking into account the well-known principle of community participation. The role of the international donor needs to be carefully scrutinised and critically reflected upon when designing support for existing local aid models. Thirdly, there are examples of local organisations who are strategically working on detachment from international aid and privileging national aid. Examples like these challenge international humanitarian actors to rethink current modalities for humanitarian aid, potentially leading to reflection on ways of supporting domestic aid systems rather than individual partnership- and project modalities.

15 See [62]–[66]

7. Longer term visions for locally-led humanitarian aid in Burkina Faso and Mali

Finally, this section discusses how local models may inform future practice and discourse of localized aid.

The previous chapters have presented a variety of terminology and models for local humanitarian aid. These have included horizontal and vertical aid, established modalities like Habbanayé and Tontine, frequently-used terminology like solidarity, and more recently introduced terms like localisation and philanthropy. Furthermore, inclusion and partnerships have been problematized and potential detachment between local and international aid discussed. Two key discussions on how local models may inform longer terms visions and approaches have emerged.

Sketching out different visions for localised aid in Burkina Faso and Mali

Given the great diversity of humanitarian approaches, humanitarian actors, aid terminology and perceptions about localisation of humanitarian aid, reflections on longer-term visions may be equally diverse. As described in chapter 5, localisation is not a mainstreamed term among local humanitarian aid providers in Burkina Faso and Mali and still appears to be centred around discussions of a few regional and national organisations linked with the international humanitarian system. However, localisation of humanitarian aid does not necessarily require a single definition shared across humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso and Mali respectively. Rather, an inclusive country-level discussion of localised aid would be helpful in identifying visions and potentially capture these in a shared national humanitarian framework, which could guide the work of international, regional, national, and local humanitarian actors. Some countries have already commenced this work, such as Indonesia, Somalia and Nigeria, for example by taking steps to establish contextualised National Reference Groups. National Reference Groups could take a role in facilitating such a

process in Burkina Faso and Mali. Discussing establishment of National Reference Groups could be a way of kickstarting reflections about longer-term visions for humanitarian aid. The absence of discussions about longer-term visions for the humanitarian aid system in Burkina Faso and Mali may lead to upholding the status quo in a scenario of potentially increasing humanitarian needs. For example, understanding lack of capacity as a fundamental challenge to local responses to humanitarian needs places a strong emphasis on capacity strengthening as a central part of the solution to meet needs. International organisations often become providers of capacity strengthening to local actors in partnership models, despite debates about what capacity may mean in different contexts [55]. In Burkina Faso, national capacities and systems are described as insufficient in terms of managing the IDP crisis and as suffering from corruption, biased support, and lack of coordination [56]. At the same time, other reports find that national actors are more capable of responding to needs than international organisations may assume [51], [52]. Partnerships focused on capacity building of individual organisations may contribute to maintaining the status quo if they do not address longer-term challenges such as donor dependency and systemic challenges to current national aid systems. In other words, a vision for localised aid based on capacity strengthening in international-local partnerships may not necessarily improve the ability of national systems to better respond to humanitarian needs in the longer term. Visions for localised aid that lean more towards localisation as an agenda that challenges conventional global North-global South power relations project a more systemic approach to national systems strengthening and models of detachment. This direction of aid may require different priorities than a vision focused on increased capacity provided in individual partnership models. Given the pattern of more frequent disasters, reduced funds for humani-

tarian needs, and an increasingly shrinking space for international aid, a powershift approach to localised aid warrants a change agenda more attuned to future scenarios. What matters, however, is that visions for localised aid in Burkina Faso and Mali respectively are discussed. In this process, national power dynamics and hierarchies must be identified, key barriers to localised aid must be sketched out, and even more importantly, a range of ways of addressing these in the longer term must be explored – including those that lie beyond what is doable in international-local partnerships.

The documentation gap/bias

There is a dearth of documentation about terminology, approaches, and the scale of horizontal and vertical humanitarian aid in Burkina Faso and Mali, despite indications that this aid is fundamental to how people in crisis are supported. This is particularly the case for horizontal humanitarian aid. An informed discussion about visions for longer term localised aid requires awareness of how research is currently commissioned by international humanitarian actors. As described in chapter 4, there is a knowledge gap in terms of documented local humanitarian action in Burkina Faso and Mali generally, as well as a lack of in-depth studies particularly. Extensive studies are required to challenge simplified assumptions about local humanitarian action as being either adequate or inadequate. When commissioning reports, international organisations need to look beyond their immediate interests and critically reflect on what knowledge they seek to unearth and for whose benefit. Lack of

critical reflection on what knowledge is prioritised in grey reports and for whom creates a documentation bias, where international aid is documented to a much wider extent than local aid models. This bias may result in a skewed image of international aid being more than local aid models, leading to visions of localisation that see international aid play a central rather than a complementary role. An informed discussion about the vision for future models of localised aid in Burkina Faso and Mali requires that the documentation bias be addressed and that local aid models be documented in ways that avoid simplification and recognise complexities [49].

“

Today communities in conflict-affected areas adopt strategies depending on the situation. For example, before the displaced arrive in a locality, the host community organizes itself to welcome them with a roof and something to eat for the first few days.

”

(Organisation in Mali, #26)

8. Conclusion

This report explored the overall question of how local models of humanitarian aid can inform future pathways and reframings of localisation in Burkina Faso and Mali. Responding to this question causes three key points stand out, namely that local humanitarian aid is multifarious when it comes to aid terminology and approaches and needs to be addressed with a high degree of granularity, that there are examples of how international aid can support local aid models, and that a joint longer-term vision for localised aid in Burkina Faso and Mali may improve aid outcomes in a future aid scenario.

Local humanitarian aid is multifarious

Local humanitarian action is described in many different ways. This means that attention to differences in terminology need to be considered when seeking to understand local humanitarian action. This also means that aid initiated, decided, and driven by local actors can be highly localised without being referred to as localised. Consequently, local humanitarian action must be documented as a multifarious concept with a diverse terminology and therefore such efforts require an in-depth research approach that avoids simplified understandings and assumptions about local humanitarian action. Terminology may be linked with proximity to crisis-affected people. Simplifying the complexity and diversity of local humanitarian action may hamper progress on localisation of humanitarian aid, as localisation initiatives beyond the framework of international aid may be overlooked and more convenient or at-hand initiatives prioritised for international support.

Successful support to local models of aid

Establishing partnerships is a preferred model for localisation widely used by international humanitarian actors globally. However, in the case of Burkina Faso international-local partnership modalities suffer from the drawback of relegating local partners to implementing partners without strategic influence, thus calling into question their potential for bringing systemic changes to national aid systems. The Habbanayé system is an example of how a local aid model

for long term development can be boosted in scale by international support. More learning needs to be extracted from this example. Examples of national humanitarian actors who focus on and privilege domestic funding strategically challenge international humanitarian actors to reflect on ways of supporting domestic aid systems rather than primarily individual partnerships and project modalities.

Shared visions for future localised humanitarian aid?

A nationally-led discussion of long-term visions for localised aid would be helpful in guiding international, regional, national, and local humanitarian actors on localisation, though this may include different understandings of what localisation means. Such a discussion would also need to take into account government-led aid in Burkina Faso and Mali – a topic that was beyond the focus of this limited study. As part of this process, key barriers to localisation need to be discussed and solutions to overcome these barriers identified. These solutions need to be brought forward and prioritised even when they lie beyond what can currently be supported by international actors and in current international-local partnership models.

Discussing visions for localisation of humanitarian aid is by no means a panacea and is a highly political undertaking, nationally and internationally. However, the process of charting visions may reveal potential models or areas of investment that can guide future humanitarian aid. Shared visions may also provide crucial alternative aid models in a time of increasing humanitarian needs on a global scale and declining international humanitarian funds. Country-led processes designed to sketch out longer-term visions for localised aid in Burkina Faso and Mali respectively could begin by critically analysing how people in crises are already navigating different strategies to manage their situation.

Annexes

Annex A: Key terminology

Though humanitarian terms can be defined in many different ways, for the purpose of this report, we understand and use key terms in the following way:

Humanitarian action: Activities that save lives, protect livelihoods, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of crisis, as well as prevent and strengthen the preparedness for occurrence of such situations [5, p. 5].

This definition is used as it allows a focus on humanitarian action that does not necessarily or explicitly claim allegiance to the humanitarian principles. This is the case for some of the local humanitarian actions described in chapter 6.

Humanitarian action or development:

In international aid systems most aid is organised under categories of development and humanitarian aid. Each category entails specific funding modalities, financial and reporting requirements, basis for decisionmaking, geographical attention, temporalities and aid approaches. For example, international humanitarian aid is guided by the humanitarian principles, the Core Humanitarian Standard and the Sphere indicators, while the international development sector is less regulated by common guidelines. The renewed attention to the humanitarian and development nexus emphasises that these two categories overlap and boundaries between them are heavily blurred. However, while this conceptual pair continues to structure international aid, local actors think about or categorise aid in different ways and does not necessarily distinguish between addressing acute emergency needs and longer-term development support. Though recognizing this artificial distinction between these two categories, in this report we are mainly concerned with local models that address needs of people in crisis. We consequently prioritise what international terminology would refer to as humanitarian action over descriptions of development initiatives¹⁶, however recognizing that

this approach limits a deeper understanding of linkages between short-term and long-term aid and further exploration of the humanitarian-development nexus in this report.

Local: The use of the term “local” is problematic in this report for several reasons. Firstly, it indicates an international perspective on what happens on or closer to “the ground”, whereas local humanitarian actors does not refer to themselves as “local”. The use of the term in this report emphasises the challenge with how terminology more or less consciously indicate perspective. Secondly, the term “local” tend to become an easy way of capturing and simplifying complex actions, interaction and politics, which reduce the complexities of how humanitarian action is carries out in Burkina Faso and Mali. Some academic literature on localisation critically examine assumptions around “the local” and find that the term is often used to simplify complex relations and imbued with characteristics that are opposite to “the international”. The scholars suggest introduction of concepts such as the “multi-local” [50] and “critical localism” [49]. For lack of a more suitable term, in this report we use the term “local” shorthand to denote proximity, connection, and knowledge of everyday life and community structures in Burkina Faso and Mali.

Local aid: Local aid describes humanitarian action shaped by individuals and communities in proximity to people in need (geographically as well as through different connections) rather than actions shaped by and carried out within a framework of the international humanitarian system.

International humanitarian system: The report uses ALNAP’s working definition of the international humanitarian system to describe “the network of interconnected institutional and operational entities through which humanitarian action is undertaken when local and national resources are, on their own, insufficient to meet the needs of a population in crisis.

¹⁶ Development support is generally more thoroughly described in academic literature and commissioned reports, though there may be a knowledge gap about this topic too.

These entities are operationally or financially related to each other and share common overarching goals, norms and principles in humanitarian action” [57, p. 5].

Localisation: “Localisation” was mainstreamed in international humanitarian discourse following the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016 [1], [58], [59]. The concept usually refers to the commitment made at the World Humanitarian Summit to ensure “More support and funding tools for local and national responders”[60]. However, the concept is interpreted and implemented in many ways by a range of actors across international, regional, national, and local levels. In this report, the term is used broadly to reflect differences in understandings of the concept and embrace definitions ranging from decentralisation to transformation[61].

Annex B: List of abbreviations

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CBA	Community Based Association
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
GFCF	Global Fund for Community Foundation
IDP	internally displaced people
IHA	international humanitarian assistance
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NNGO	national non-governmental organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SCD	Save the Children Denmark
SPONG	Secrétariat Permanent des ONG
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WACSI	West Africa Civil Society Institut

Annex C: Methodology

The report is a desk study supported by an online survey and interviews carried out with local humanitarian stakeholders from Burkina Faso and Mali in 2022.

The survey asked for examples of local humanitarian action from organisations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and was shared through the networks of West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and Save the Children Denmark. The survey sparked more than 50 responses from organisations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, all providing valuable insight into the diversity of ways in which local aid was provided and perceived in the three countries. The survey responses mainly highlighted different forms of community support and individuals supporting IDPs, which led to a focus on these themes in the further research. These two thematic areas were further pursued when selecting people to interview. In order to prioritise the exploration of a limited number of types of local humanitarian action, two types were identified for inquiry in interviews based on the following criteria:

- accessibility of interviewees,
- geographic spread,
- frequency in the survey

Using these criteria, two types of local humanitarian action, namely community support and individuals supporting IDPs, were selected for further investigation. Nine semi-structured interviews were carried out online with the suggested local organisations and individuals. Five are from Burkina Faso and four are from Mali. These respondents comprised one individual providing support ad hoc and informally, one civil society/community based organization, four local NGOs, two national NGOs, and one international NGO. Due to connection issues, two of these interviews were done by or supplemented with written communication. The interviews were subsequently thematically coded in NVIVO.

Secondary data were selected and collected in the following way. The literature search was divided into three main categories: academic literature published in peer-reviewed journals, reports commissioned by development or humanitarian organisations, and

newspaper and media articles. Based on discussions in the research consortium, the following search terms were used in English and French combined with either Burkina Faso, Mali or Sahel: humanitarian aid/aide humanitaire, foreign aid/aide étrangère, local humanitarian/humanitaire locale, local leadership/leadership-gestion locale, national/nationale, local/local, partnership/partnerariat-association, Sahel/Sahel, localisation-localization/localisé, locally-led/dirigé localement, community/communauté, IDPs/PDIs, displaced/déplacé, vulnerable people/les gens vulnérables, migrants/les migrants, refugees/réfugiés, and children/enfants. The same search terms were used for all the categories. For the first category, Google Scholar and Scopus databases were searched and 40+ documents were identified. Of these 25 were selected because they contained direct references to local aid, community and traditional practices, community and NGO partnerships, NGO support and aid to IDPs. The second category of literature, grey reports, was identified through references within the research group, as well as a broad internet search. 39 reports were selected because they specifically discuss community practices (e.g. Tontine, Habbanayé) and interventions, relations between host and IDP communities, and aid distributed by national and local organisations and in partnerships between different humanitarian stakeholders. Investigation of the third category of newspaper and media articles accessible online included the identification of 30 major newspapers and media outlets in Burkina Faso and Mali (via broad internet search), then searching for the French and English terms on these newspaper and media sites. Using these search terms, 42 newspaper and media articles were selected, as they specifically referenced community collectives, aid partnerships, infrastructure projects, aid donations, solidarity and community days, and the challenges involved in providing aid to vulnerable people. Resources not captured by the search on online French and English newspaper and media articles include: media in local languages (e.g. Bambara - Mali, Mossi - Burkina Faso), local print newspapers, radio, and social media.

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